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E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN MEDIA REACTION ON GOTX POSITION ON
CARTOONS OF PROPHET MUHAMMAD

Ref: ASHGABAT 00184

¶1. (U) On February 9, 2006, one week later than most Islamic countries, the GOTX expressed its opinion regarding the cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad. Per reftel, the MFA issued a press release on the only government sponsored website, turkmenistan.ru, as well as in major print dailies "Turkmenistan" (government, Turkmen, circulation 25,591), "Neutral Turkmenistan" (government, Russian, circulation 31,100) expressing the GOTX's endorsement of the UN's statements urging moderation and dialogue on the issue. On the evening of February 9, the daily government news program Watan TV News broadcast the article. The press release was also published throughout Ashgabat's official media and covered by major media distributors, BBC Monitoring Newsfile, Interfax, and RIA Novosti. The issue was carried by RFE/RL and some other media distributors February 10.

¶2. (SBU) By the time GOTX reacted to the issue, the 70 percent of the population in Turkmenistan who have Russian TV satellite reception were already aware of the issue. Most surprisingly, a popular newspaper in Turkmenistan, the Turkmen edition of the mainland Turkey Zaman newspaper of Islamist bent, had not covered the issue - whereas Zaman had given extensive coverage to the Kosova and Bosnian crises. Reactions or opinions of the Turkmenistani people regarding the cartoons of the Prophet were not described by national media sources before or after the MFA official release.

¶3. Comment: Post has not heard of or seen any public reaction in Turkmenistan to the GOTX statement or to the cartoons publication. End Comment.